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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: UNICEF Representative Discusses Child Labor

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 16, Ambassador Norland met with UNICEF Representative in Uzbekistan Mahboob Shareef to discuss child labor in the cotton fields. Shareef discussed a recent high-level meeting with the GOU, and discussed his ideas for short- and long-term solutions to the child labor problem in Uzbekistan. End Summary.

Meeting with Azimov

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¶2. (SBU) Shareef reported that he met with First Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov earlier this week, and stressed to him the need for Uzbekistan to fulfill its international obligations and to implement the National Action Plan (NAP) on child labor that it enacted last year. Azimov stated that the GOU is committed to not using child labor, and mentioned a few steps the GOU is taking to prevent it. For example, the Ministry of Labor just completed training sessions for 200 labor monitors, who, according to the NAP, will go out in teams to the various districts and monitor whether child labor is being used, beginning in mid-October. The GOU has also set up a hotline for people to call with questions regarding child labor or to report observations of child labor. Shareef said he encouraged Azimov to publicize these activities, noting that press coverage of the call centers would be well received in the international community.

¶3. (SBU) Shareef had in his possession during the meeting two letters that Acting Minister of Labor A. Khaitov sent out last fall; one to the Minister of Public Education, and one to the Chairman of the Farmers' Association of Uzbekistan. Both reference Uzbekistan's ILO obligations, and forbid the use of secondary school children in the cotton fields. The letters also state that officials who permit use of labor by secondary school children for cotton picking are liable in accordance with Uzbek legislation. Shareef stated that he encouraged Azimov to send the same letter this year to all of the hokimiyats to ensure broad awareness that the use of child labor will not be sanctioned by the government. Azimov responded that he would consider it.

¶4. (SBU) Shareef also presented Azimov with a chart that linked the various relevant agencies to their responsibilities under the NAP. Azimov noted that it was a helpful analysis, in

that 21 agencies and ministries have responsibilities under the Plan. Shareef encouraged greater leadership from the Ministry of Labor in detailing what the other agencies needed to do in order to meet their obligations.

15. (SBU) Shareef expressed his belief that the GOU is sincerely trying to address the problem, albeit with small steps. He also said he had the sense that the GOU would try use unemployed adult workers as much as possible in the cotton harvest this year, but that the success of the program will depend in large part on the willingness of those unemployed workers to take part at the wage levels on offer.

#### Short- and Long-term Tactics

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16. Shareef stated his ideas for both short- and long-term tactics to address the child labor problem in Uzbekistan. In the short term, he suggested the following: 1) A campaign to ensure that all local officials are aware of and in compliance with the GOU's stated policy that child labor will not be used in the cotton

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harvest; 2) A public awareness campaign directed toward the families of school children, which should include the risks and negative effects children face in doing the harvest; 3) Promotion of diversification and mechanization of crops, both of which would reduce the number of children needed to work the fields.

17. Shareef puts the ILO assessment in his long-term planning goals. He stated that he believes that if successes are made on some of the short-term goals, perhaps more trust would develop between the GOU and the international community, and the GOU would be more amenable to a comprehensive ILO assessment in two or three years. He suggested two other possible long-term ideas: a financing plan and an incentive plan. UNICEF is currently working with the World Bank on a cost/benefit analysis of child labor. With this analysis, UNICEF hopes to be able to evaluate the children's contribution to the cotton harvest, and come up with a monetary figure that would be needed in order for the GOU to pay adult workers. The World Bank would then look into financing that amount. An incentive plan, as the name implies, would involve diplomatic and NGO communities providing certain incentives in exchange for gains in this area by the GOU. Shareef suggested that the international community get together to brainstorm other possible tactics. In the meantime, UNICEF plans to continue its education campaigns, and will do its own informal field survey, as it has in the past.

Comment

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18. (C) Now that it is certain that the ILO will not be invited for this year's harvest, the international community needs to refocus on how to positively impact this issue. Shareef considers boycotts harmful to the interests of children, and we agree in the case of Uzbekistan. The harvest generally continues throughout October and November, and can even go into December, so there is still time to find effective ways to influence practices this year. UNICEF's short- and long-term proposals present a good starting point on which further brainstorming can be done.

NORLAND